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## Renewable energy gets support

**By Claudia Lauer**  
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The U.S. Department of Agriculture handed out \$9 million in renewable energy and energy efficiency funding on Tuesday, some of which will make its way to Kansas.

White KingCo. Inc., of Kingman, and Hayes Sight and Sound, of Hutchinson, received a total of about \$70,000 in loans and \$70,000 in matching grants from the last rounds of energy funding in the 2002 farm appropriations bill, which is renewed every five years.

Both businesses received the money to make improvements to their heating, electrical and refrigeration systems.

"Installing new, more-efficient fixtures in local stores can be vital to the economy. Energy can be one of the highest overhead costs," said Chuck Banks, state director of the Kansas USDA Rural Development, which administers the grants. "Small businesses like grocery stores are a vital part of rural America. Helping them increase their bottom line is a way to help them stay open."

The majority of Kansas project proposals for the national energy funding competitions has been for energy efficiency improvements at businesses in rural parts of the state. Kansas received funding in 2003, 2004 and 2005 for similar projects.

This was the first year the state had project proposals for renewable energy, including one for wind power and one for geo-thermal power development. Banks said the state is waiting to hear about funding for those projects at the end of this month.

While Banks and representatives from other state organizations were excited about the awards, they also were eager to find out if the 2007 Farm Bill will be as generous toward rural development and energy concerns, two big issues facing the state.

In 2005, Kansas was ranked No. 1 in the country by the USDA for wheat and sorghum production. It ranked fifth for hay and forage, and 10th for corn grain production. All of those crops can be used for biofuel renewable energy sources.

"The Midwest, when it comes to renewable energy, is at the forefront of production because that's where most of the country's biomass is grown," said Jim Brownlee, a spokesman for the USDA. "It's hard to say what's possible from the Farm Bill next year because it has to go through Congress, but (USDA) Secretary Mike Johanns is definitely committed to the expansion of renewable energy and energy funding."

Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., a senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, was unavailable for immediate comment. In an address to the Kansas Farm Bureau county presidents earlier this year, Roberts said he was hopeful about the policy that could be shaped and the contributions Kansas could make to alternative energy.

"Kansas plays a unique role in ethanol and wind energy. Kansas is home to seven operating ethanol plants, with several more coming on line soon," he said. "As interest in wind energy grows, we need to look to communities like Montezuma, Beaumont and Spearville to utilize these alternative energy resources that decrease the cost of fuel and build local economies."

While Johanns has committed himself to fighting for rural development and renewable energy program funding, shrinking national budget funds could prove to be the deciding factor when Congress doles out money this fall for the bill, which also covers subsidized school lunches, conservation, and plant and crop research.

In a separate announcement Wednesday, the USDA and the U.S. Department of Energy announced funding for renewable energy projects at nine schools, including Kansas State University, which received \$700,000 for a genomics project. In his release, Johanns said that the genomics projects will help find ways to mass produce the grains going into biofuel production.

#### AWARD RECIPIENTS

##### 2002 Farm Bill

Hayes Sight and Sound, Hutchinson, \$26,000 in grants, \$26,000 in loans - Replacing HVAC and lighting systems

White's KingCo. Inc., Kingman and Phillipsburg, \$48,838 in grants, \$48,830 in loans - Replace refrigeration and lighting systems

USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service Kansas State University, \$700,000 - Plant genomics research for ethanol/biofuels

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